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ABSTRACT

Several program transcripts on educational testing from the National Public Radio series, Options in Education, are included in this pamphlet. In "The I.Q. Controversy," Ned Block discusses culturally biased standardized tests. Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, former Director of the National Institute of Education, and Noel Epstein, Education Editor of the Washington Post engage in a dialogue on tests and testing. Chuck Stone, columnist for the Philadelphia Inquirer, speaks on "Standardized Tests and Black Kids." William Raspberry, columnist for the Washington Post, gives his advice on "Teaching Students to Take Tests." Dr. Hodgkinson and Mr. Epstein engage in a second debate over "Race and Intelligence." Dr. Elias Blake, Director of the Institute for Services to Education discusses "A Fantasy: How to Accurately Compare Intelligence of Blacks and Whites;" and "The Relationship of Standardized Tests and Textbooks" is discussed by Dr. Jerrold Zacharias, a physicist currently working with the "Infinity Factory," public television's mathematics program. (Author/MV)

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Program #78

TESTING & RESEARCH
PART I
May 16, 1977

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What is the meaning of the word "microscope?"
Who wrote "Hamlet?"
Why is it better to give money to organized charities instead of street beggars?
Why do we lock criminals up?
If a child younger than you hits you, what do you do?
What are you supposed to do if you find someone's wallet or pocketbook in a store?

MERROW: I'm John Merrow.

BLAIR: And I'm Wendy Blair. And those are some of the questions American school children encounter every year in standardized tests.

Candelabra is to candle as chandelier is to _____?
1) Book 2) Ben Hur 3) Light bulb 4) Elaborate

MERROW: So, get our your #2 pencil because this week, OPTIONS IN EDUCATION will be all about testing.

BLAIR: The first question is really more of a riddle.

MERROW: Right. Here it is: What do the PTA, the National Education Association, and the Elementary School Principals have in common?

BLAIR: Give up? The answer is: They're all against standardized testing in our schools!

HODGKINSON: I think they should ban all I.Q. Tests, do away with them! Group I.Q. Tests are something we got enamored with in the 1930's, and as the Depression hopefully passed us in the 1930's, I wish I.Q. Tests had as well.

And the tests are seductive - in that they appear to be more objective than they are.

HODGKINSON: The higher your income, the higher your test scores.

De Toqueville pointed out long ago - We just love to measure ourselves against everybody else. We're probably the world's greatest gossips. And a test is just a marvelous way of gossiping about somebody else or some other school district or some other state.

MERROW: Those are some of the critics and defenders of testing you'll be hearing from later in the program.

BLAIR: We'll be looking at the testing industry in this country, too. And the tests - Achievement Tests, I.Q. Tests, Criterion Reference Tests, Graduate Record Exams, SAT, and so forth.

MERROW: All of us have encountered several of these tests. They probably had an important effect on our lives, and they will have on the future of our children who are taking them today. So, it's important to understand who manufactures and sells these tests.

BLAIR: And how the tests are used and by whom.

MERROW: Right now, schools spend millions of dollars a year on testing and more than 150 million tests are being given.

BLAIR: Tests are often used to "track" students. That is, separate children into groups. Early school test scores may later on actually be obstacles to individual success in higher education. There's a theory that students rise to the level of expectation a teacher has for them. If a teacher sees average test scores, he or she may expect average performance.

MERROW: I remember in my first year in teaching. I was expected, I was told by other teachers, that I should go take a look at my students' past records, look at their test scores so I'd have a sense of who I was going to have in class. And something seemed wrong about doing that, and some other teachers said, "Don't do that because then you'll make up your mind." So, I just sort of compromised. I waited for about a month, and tried to make my own judgments, and then went and looked at the scores. But if you did go right on the first day and looked, and then you say, "Ah-hah. That's a C-student. That's a B-student." And I bet that it would turn out that that's the way the grades would come out.

BLAIR: Yes. I remember being very, very impressed when I knew that someone had a very high I.Q.

PRO'S AND CONS: STANDARDIZED TESTING

STONE: This transcript is from a student who finished Adelphi University. He received straight A's - Physics, Physiology, Biology, Psychology, Elementary Botany, Microbiology, Organic Chemistry. No jive social science courses. Real natural science courses. Straight A. 4.0 average. He had applied to all of the major university graduate schools when he finished Adelphi. And was rejected by every single one - Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Columbia - every single, major university. Why? Because he only scored in the 400's on his GRE, Graduate Record Exam.

I would prefer not to judge anybody by a score, but rather on their actual performance as a human being. And anything that we can do to de-label kids - including I.Q. scores - I think is to the better.

STONE: The Testing Industry? I call it "The Testing Mafia!"

MERROW: "Tracking" - or labeling - of students by test scores really does run counter to our democratic ideal, that all students are equal and should be given equal opportunity. In fact, a straight-A student, whose scores are low on SAT Tests, may not get into college.

BLAIR: Right now, 42 education associations have banded together in a consortium to look for new ways to evaluate and measure student performance. They want to reduce our reliance on standardized testing.

MERROW: One of the most widely criticized tests is the I.Q., Intelligence Quotient Test, first developed by Alfred Binet at Stanford. In a way, I.Q. tests have been in the center of the testing controversy for a long time. What's intelligence? And how can you be sure that an I.Q. test is really measuring it?

BLAIR: Ned Block wrote a book called The I.Q. Controversy. He told NPR's Bob Edwards that the tests actually measure knowledge and vocabulary, but they are culturally biased and may not necessarily measure intelligence at all.

BLOCK: Because what they basically contain is items that tap knowledge. They rest on the assumption that differences in what kids know, or what adults know, reflect differences in how smart they are. But, as everybody knows, people of equal intelligence often differ in how much they know. Often because of their cultural background. For example, how much your parents know is related to how much you know.

EDWARDS: Some people are just better at tests than others.

BLOCK: Some people are better at tests, and some people are better at tests for very superficial reasons, like checking your answers, whether you have a tendency to give up on hard questions, whether you have a tendency to guess, whether you get very anxious in a testing situation. Another important factor is your persistence; whether you really put yourself into it, or whether you're not so highly motivated.

EDWARDS: Then some people, like me, will skip over and go and get, you know, for volume rather than . . .

BLOCK: Another thing is your strategy; how good you are at guessing at what the testmaker might have had in mind. If you like, I can read you a few questions and suggested right answers. They're very revealing.

EDWARDS: It seems like you would only measure them one way. For example, there's a right and a wrong answer.

BLOCK: That's right. Here's a typical . . . well, I'll just read you a few questions. One is: Why is it usually better to give money to a well-known charity than to a street beggar? Now, in order to get full credit, you have to mention two out of three points. One of these three points is that it makes a more orderly way of contribution for the doner. For example, it's tax deductible. It helps you at tax time. Now, you can imagine a kid in a poor neighborhood where tax deductions aren't a very major part of people's consciousness might not find this at all, would not be likely to give this kind of answer. Also, the child might reasonably think that it's better to give money to poor people - people he can see - rather than give money to a charity where you support the whole apparatus of the charity.

EDWARDS: The overhead . . .

BLOCK: The kind of people he sees really need it.

EDWARDS: Fat salaries and expensive office suites.

BLOCK: Right. Other questions are . . . well, here's an example. "What's the thing to do if you lose a ball that belongs to one of your friends?" This is for very young children. I think around six or so. And in order to get two points credit, you have to say that you replace the loss.

EDWARDS: A six-year old child is going to go out and buy a ball?

BLOCK: Yeah. Well, obviously, middle-class kids . . or probably middle-class kids already have balls that they can give away, but a lower class kid might not have a ball, and might not be able to get his mother to buy one. They give no credit at all for the answer, "Tell him you're sorry." Most standard I.Q. tests are full of that kind of question, that just seem to tap middle-class values more than anything else.

EDWARDS: Are they of any value at all, those questions?

BLOCK: As far as the purposes for which they're used - that is, "tracking," you know, putting kids in a college-bound school track or a non-college-bound school track - classifying people as mentally retarded, admissions to colleges, I don't think they're very good for those purposes.

EDWARDS: What would you substitute for I.Q. tests?

BLOCK: Well, there's been some interesting research along these lines. Some of the best research has been done by a fellow named Wallach at Duke University. And he points out in a number of articles that various kinds of extra-curricular achievement in college, and even in high school, are better predictors of how people will do in professions than either their grades or I.Q. scores.

EDWARDS: What sorts of activities?

BLOCK: Well, say in literature, for example, writing things, being in science fairs doing scientific projects, and similar kinds of things in college. Whether the person does research or projects on his own outside of school. Even clubs that people belong to where they put things on. Those turn out to be better predictors of success later on in life than either grades or scores on any kind of test.

BLAIR: Ned Block, author of The I.Q. Controversy talking with NPR's Bob Edwards.

MERROW: One important theme that educators revealed to us is that knowing how to take a test is very important. I remember being taught how to psyche out a test, how to estimate the answer if I didn't know it.

BLAIR: Right. And if there are five possible answers, and you know for sure that two of them are wrong, well, the odds are one-to-three that you might get the right answer.

MERROW: But if you couldn't eliminate any of the answers, then the teacher told us not to try to guess because in most tests wrong answers are counted against you. But not all students are really taught how to take a test.

BLAIR: And most of us remember the anxiety we felt on those test days. At least to many of us, it seemed that our future was riding on listening to the directions and filling in the block labeled A, B, C, or D completely, put it in with your pencil dark enough . . .

MERROW: And make sure that you don't let the pencil mark go over the line, outside the little box.

BLAIR: And you keep watching for when other people are turning the pages, and if you're too far behind, then it's just . . . you know you're real dumb!

MERROW: I remember panicking . . . you know, "Oh-oh, that guy over there - he's doing better . . he's faster . . . awful!"

As a nation, we've always been fascinated by contests and tests, in a way, are really just a form of that. Now, more and more critics are saying that it's time we outgrew them.

BLAIR: I.Q. tests are out of favor, and hardly anyone defends them without reservation. Tests of intelligence are now called "Aptitude Tests" and knowledge is tested by "Achievement Tests."

MERROW: The standardized tests are big business. Last year, millions of young Americans took as many as three tests, and the testmakers grossed over $200 million. The giant.

Educational Testing Service, ETS, of Princeton, New Jersey, sold $60 million worth of tests. The other big companies include The American College Testing Program, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, Science Research Associates, which is a subsidiary of IBM, Houghton Mifflin and McGraw-Hill.

BLAIR: The testing industry, and the tests, are under heavy attack partly because they have become so important in our lives - or, at least in the lives of our children. And for every person saying, "Get rid of the tests." There's someone else saying, "Let's improve the tests." Or, "Let's create more tests to measure more things."

MERROW: I talked with Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, former Director of the National Institute of Education, and Noel Epstein, Education Editor of The Washington Post, about tests and testing. First, Bud Hodgkinson.

DIALOGUE ON TESTS & TESTING: HODGKINSON & EPSTEIN

HODGKINSON: This is nothing new, John. Americans, De Toqueville pointed out long ago, we just love to measure ourselves against everybody else. We're probably the world's greatest gossips. And a test is just a marvelous way of gossiping about somebody else, or some other school district, some other state. And the notion of comparing people with other people's performance on something that appears to be objective and neutral, there's just too much of a temptation. And the tests are seductive - in that they appear to be more objective than they are.

EPSTEIN: There's perceived by the public - again, in part, because of what the press is reporting - that there's an enormous decline in the abilities in English among students today in general. It so happens that the last study by the National Assessment of Education, which was last year sometime, showed that students were doing . . . these were three groups of students in the public schools . . . were doing as well as ever in the basics of English - meaning grammar, spelling, syntax, all the fundamental skills. In the last ten years or so, much greater emphasis was placed in the public schools on other things than basic skills, particularly on the high school level. Electives grew and students were not studying as much English as they used to. They weren't required to take, for example, four years of English. On the other hand, the tests are still measuring for four years of English.

HODGKINSON: It's become a lightning rod for what's wrong with . . everybody's pet theory about "what's wrong with America" - and, of course, we run across one of these every so often, and I think this is a perfect example. But Noel's right in that the high school curriculum has gone from a thousand to two thousand course titles in the last decade. The tests don't recognize that diversity.

EPSTEIN: Therefore, the real question is - What do you value in terms of teaching students? Do you want them to learn about the social questions, or do you want them to take the fourth year of English? Now, that's a very important question. I'm not saying it isn't. But that's the question rather than whether the schools are failing.

MERROW: But what's happening, though, people are saying, "Listen. This diverse curriculum that Bud Hodgkinson just referred to, that's being abandoned." People are saying, "Look, those test scores. We've got to get those kids back to where they should be; taking four years in English." So, in effect, the tests are in an odd way dictating the curriculum.

HODGKINSON: Absolutely.

EPSTEIN: They always have. And I'm not sure . . you know, Plato had his own way of testing, too, and that determined the curriculum, and the Regents in New York State have determined the curriculum for fifty years, and that doesn't seem to mean that New York kids don't learn to read and write.

I think the other side of this issue is probably of equal importance, and that is that the kind of test that needs to be developed today is something that we just don't know very much about. Whether the so-called Criterion Reference Test . . .

MERROW: You should explain those.

EPSTEIN: Yeah . . . are just beginning to hit. And I think this is going to be a very important development. A Norm Reference Test is a test in which you take all of the scores that are given by every kid in the sample, and you divide by the number of scores, and you get a norm. And that, basically, is a statistical average for that group. That doesn't help any teacher to do anything. If, on the other hand, the test is designed upon some specific criteria - like, can this person fill out a driver's license, or can't he? - then you begin to get some criteria that will help the teacher decide how to help that person do the kind of thing they need to do. That sort of test is relatively new, and I think that's where the expansion's going to be.

MERROW: One of my children spends probably five or six days during the school year in the public schools here in the District of Columbia taking those Criterion Reference Tests, and then, later on, a few months later, we get a print-out, which has a plus or a minus indicating how well he, in this case, is doing in reading comprehension, how well in . . . a whole number of other areas in both math and English. Your assumptions are, one, that not only do we look at it, and react to it, but also the teacher looks at it, and the teacher, then, has the time to work with Joshua on his reading comprehension or whatever.

EPSTEIN: Yes. And also your print-out will list probably ten or fifteen different specific variables that Joshua is getting better at, or not showing progress at. So, it's more public domain. You know what the problems are. The teacher knows what the problems are. And Joshua knows what the problems are. Compared to the old notion of a single A, B, or C given three times a year, you're getting a lot more useful information than parents used to get.

MERROW: And the assumption, once again, is that that teacher - in this case, his teacher - will have the time and the energy and the commitment to go look at his group and say, "Well, let's see now. Here's this little guy and he's a little weak in this area. And it seems to me that I've a few other kids. I'll put all them together, and I'll work with them." That's an unrealistic assumption in most schools in this country, I suspect. Because we don't have enough money to have enough teachers to provide that kind of instruction.

EPSTEIN: But the alternative is to expect teachers to do that without the data. And that seems to me even more unrealistic. Given the choice of the two unrealistic assumptions, I'd rather go with the data on the hopes that eventually it will get the teachers and teacher aides and volunteers who may be able to work with kids, too; that there will be more use of that kind of data than you could accomplish without it.

BLAIR: Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, former Director of the National Institute of Education, and Noel Epstein, Education Editor of The Washington Post. They're probably right about the future's promising more tests, not fewer.

MERROW: Common sense indicates that Criterion Reference Tests could be useful if they're designed to show teachers and parents where a child's strengths and weaknesses are.

BLAIR: But the other tests mentioned - Norm Reference Tests - won't go away because everyone, especially school boards and taxpayers, wants to know how their schools stack up against schools across the country.

MERROW: Teachers give "pre-tests" before they do the teaching. Then, they teach it - whatever it is you're supposed to be learning - and then, after that, they give what's called a "post-test" to find out if you learned it. That way, supposedly, they can not only measure your learning, but they can also measure how good the curriculum is, and perhaps

how good their own teaching is. If this keeps up, classroom time will be spent in testing. Then there won't be any time left for teaching, and, then, there won't be anything to test for.

As we mentioned earlier, race and class are issues in testing precisely because there's no such thing as a bias-free test. Inevitably, tests reflect the background of the testmakers and so cultural bias creeps in.

BLAIR: "Creeps in . . . nothing!" - says some critics. The bias is pervasive and all tests do is measure your parents' social class, income and race. Recently, the District of Columbia Citizens for Better Public Education sponsored a forum on testing at which prominent Black journalists talked about standardized tests.

STONE: All standardized tests are really I.Q. tests in varying degrees of disguise.

MERROW: First, Chuck Stone, a columnist for The Philadelphia Enquirer and The Washington Star, and a strong critic of the testing industry.

CHUCK STONE

STONE: This transcript is from a student who finished Adelphi University. He received straight-A's -- physics, physiology, biology, psychology, elementary botany, microbiology, organic chemistry -- no jive social science courses -- real natural science courses. Straight-A, 4.0 average. He had applied to all of the major university graduate schools when he finished Adelphi, and was rejected by every single one - Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Columbia, every single major university. Why? Because he only scored in the 400's on his GRE, Graduate Record Exam. So, this young man with a straight-A average was denied the opportunity to go to graduate school. And this, to me, is one of the most critical dangers of the various standardized tests that are used as what we call "prediction instruments." In other words, they're used to predict behavior. And what is used as a single predictor - in other words, you rely only on the test results and nothing else - then, that is a horrible misuse and abuse of testing. And that's why you have the DeFunis case because Mr. DeFunis said, "My law school aptitude test scores are higher than all these other Black kids. Therefore, you should admit me." . . . . failed to use a combination of grade point averages, standardized test results, evidence of motivation, recommendations and so forth, are what we call a "multi-varied analysis," several variables, then these Black kids might be admitted. So, testing is abused when they use it as one, single instrument. And even ETS admits way inside the literature . . . it says, "However, the single, best predictor of college performance is the high school record." Yet, every Admissions Counsellor in the country will use the SAT as the primary instrument for admission. What they do is they have a cut-off score . . . "All right, we maybe have 5,000 applications for 400 vacancies. Nobody below 600 will even be considered for admission." And what this does -- the upper-16% of all kids on standardized tests includes only 2.5% minority kids. So, when you say that, "We'll only admit the top 16% on a standardized test," you wipe out 98% of all Black kids in the country who could be considered for admission.

Certain standardized tests, such as the SAT, do not predict as accurately what Black kids will do as what white kids will do. Why, again, by ETS' own research, first year performance . . . that's all SAT predicts, incidentally . . . what you'll do in your first year. They found only one college for the white kids that had a non-significant correlation. But they found six colleges, six times as many, that had no significant correlation. In other words, the tests did not predict as well for Blacks as it did for whites. In fact, six times worse. And ETS's conclusion was, "Well, it predicts about as well for Blacks as it does for whites." I say six to one is damned unwell and not well at all. All standardized tests are really I.Q. tests in varying degrees of disguise.

I mean, you get the same kind of items on all these standardized tests, and ETS tests - whether it's an SAT, GRE, LSAT, Graduate Study in Business Test, Foreign Service Examination - all have the same items. They just have different emphases. That's all. But they're the same items.

And I.Q. tests have been widely condemned. Right now, a number of educational groups - The National Association of Elementary & Secondary School Principals want to get rid of I.Q. tests. Henry Dyer, who was the Vice President of ETS when I was there, called I.Q. tests "statistical monstrosities." Standardized and I.Q. tests are not only culturally biased against minority students - they further stultify intellectual growth and self esteem. They don't diagnose what the problems are. In other words, they don't isolate that you have a difficulty in learning antonyms or synonyms. You may say, "Well, I just flunked the whole verbal section." Well, you scored 331 on a test that's scored toward an 800 - what are your problems? Why did you only score 331, which is what the average Black student applying to a Black college scores? 331. 110 points lower than the average white student applying. What are his weaknesses? Why has he scored that low?

Standardized tests are derivations of social, economic status - not learning ability. The higher your income, the higher your test score. And even ETS did this. And as Hugh Lane, who works for Dr. Blake, said, "ETS published this table and they didn't mean to do that. That was a mistake." All right, here's the table that points out - it shows the SAT averages, and the family average income. For example, if your income is $7,000-$7,599, your score's likely to be 200-249. As it goes up to $16,000, your SAT score runs about 500-549. When the family income gets to $22,000, the SAT average is 700-750. And the reason I'm so upset with my daughter - I'm saying, "Krishna, your father has done well financially . . . (laughter) . . . and then you score what you do on the SAT. You're defying the hell out of this table." It really grieves me. Because public schools and public education . . . I'm going to upset some people in here now . . . are absolute failures. There are only two ways to raise standardized test scores: One, turn public schools over to the private corporations because private schools do a better job at educating kids than public schools. And that's an absolute fact. It's a statistical fact. You can't deny it. I'm not saying that it should be, or it's a nice thing, but I suggest those are the facts of life. Just like we sing and dance for the white folk - it's just a fact of life, but I don't want it to be that way. And, number two, increase the social economic status of Blacks by bringing them up to the white median family income and they'll score at the same level.

Once again, we have a discrepancy between $14,000 and $18,000, which are the two median family incomes for white and Blacks in the country. Mr. Jimmy Carter's announcement notwithstanding. You're going to have a gap between test scores. The testing industry? I call them "The Testing Mafia." And the Godfather of The Testing Mafia is the Educational Testing Service.

But the whole thrust, again, of our efforts should be to stop standardized testing in the public school systems that have large minorities and low income students - because you show me a hundred test scores, and I'll tell you where they come from; whether they're from Montgomery County or Washington, D. C., whether they're from Princeton or Newark, whether they're white or Black, or low income or high income. This is a fact of sociological life. It is not something that we want to be. It's not a "desideratum." It's what exists right now because of the kind of racial oppression and segregation that has controlled this society over the last hundred years.

The entire testing industry - especially ETS - should be investigated by the United States Congress. There should be a congressional investigation of what tests do to our lives, the educational process. How do tests control the educational system? Next year build new schools, turn over the whole governmental and education structure of the city, and you'd be stuck with the same standardized tests. That's the danger of standardized testing. It is not responsive to changes in society, and I think there should

be a five-year moratorium on all standardized testing in public education until minority psychologists have been authoritatively involved in the construction of relevant tests, and tests which more accurately and more sensitively assess the cognitive strength of Black kids. And as Sly & the Family Stone said, "Different strokes for different folks," which is just another hip way of saying, "Differential cognitive domains," or "kids learn at a different rate," and we ought to test those kids who learn in the same process.

MERROW: Chuck Stone, a columnist with The Philadelphia Enquirer and The Washington Star. He called for an investigation by Congress. Well, one of Ralph Nader's investigating teams is now studying ETS. We'll keep you posted on the results of the three-year study when they're available.

BLAIR: Not long ago, a high school valedictorian - a young Black man from the District of Columbia - was denied admission to the George Washington University here because his SAT scores were 329 out of a possible 800 on verbal, and 280 out of a possible 800 on mathematics.

MERROW: Those tests are designed so that the average score will be 500, and there's another point - you get 200 points simply for coming in and writing your name.

BLAIR: Editorials and columns everywhere attacked the school and the grading system for having deluded the young man into thinking that he was a scholar. The implicit assumption, as Chuck Stone would be quick to point out, is that tests don't lie. A university official said, "The kid has been conned. He thinks he's a real scholar. He's been deluded into thinking that he's gotten an education."

MERROW: But maybe he wasn't wrong about his abilities. Maybe that student just doesn't test well. No one bothered to question the test.

BLAIR: And that just doesn't happen to Blacks.

MERROW: At that same forum on testing with Chuck Stone, William Raspberry, a columnist for The Washington Post, talked about teaching students to take tests successfully.

WILLIAM RASPBERRY

RASPBERRY: Everybody knows what "cultural bias" does. It causes inner-city Blacks and other disadvantaged minorities to score poorly on intelligence tests, on aptitude tests, and on achievement tests. But hardly anybody seems to know exactly what it is, or whether it is a correctable condition. And, as a result, there's a growing demand for the solution of radical surgery - simply, get rid of the tests.

Unfortunately, those who tend to be most victimized by cultural bias, whatever it is, are least in position to dictate an end to the testing. There are two main propositions concerning testing and cultural bias. They often coexist in the same argument and, occasionally, are intermingled in the same sentence. The first is -- Standardized tests, because of cultural bias, do not accurately measure the capabilities of Black and other minorities. The second is -- Standardized tests may be a more or less accurate way of testing capabilities though not native intelligence, but because of cultural bias, they test those capabilities at which the middle class and white, rather than the poor and Black, tend to excel.

Because of the confusion over what cultural bias is, attempts to remedy it have shot off in a number of directions. Some have attacked tests that purport to measure reading ability as, in reality, tests of socio-economic status and vocabulary. Take, for instance, candelabra is to candle as chandelier is to 1) Book, 2) Ben Hur, 3) Light bulb, 4) Elaborate? Now, some testers would see this . . . I mean, some observers would see this an obvious example of cultural bias. What does a ghetto youngster know about chandeliers and candelabra? And they might recast the question to read: Finger is to

fist as toe is to - 1) Elbow, 2) Foot, 3) Tap Dance, or 4) Ankle? And they might be stunned to see the ghetto youngster miss that one, too. For it is beginning to appear, at least to me, that the cultural bias in tests is not so much in vocabulary or in content, but in form.

The biases in the test question as a device for uncovering reasoning ability. Robert Williams' "Bitch Test," the Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity, sidesteps the problem by testing for vocabulary only, and since the vocabulary is based on ghetto usage, Dr. Williams' test also produces higher scores for Blacks than for whites, a sort of reverse cultural bias. But not really. Vocabulary testing is too limited a solution. It doesn't tell us enough. Dr. Williams says that he's working on tests that will do for questions in logic what the "Bitch Test" has done for questions in vocabulary. He didn't say what he'd call his second generation test . . . and I'm afraid to guess.

No matter. The solution is not to come up with cutesy things that reverse the usual Black/white scoring patterns. The solution is to do what we can to give poor Black and other minority children the sort of background and support knowledge that have currency in the country; to increase their opportunities for escaping the crippling effects of poverty, and to help them pass tests.

Tests are supposed to uncover abilities, but I'm convinced that test-taking is, in itself, a distinct and important ability. The public schools ought to teach Test-Taking as a routine course, beginning in the elementary schools.

BLAIR: William Raspberry, columnist for The Washington Post, speaking at a forum on testing, sponsored by the Washington, D. C. Citizens for Better Public Education. He made two points -- First, initiate courses in test-taking.

MERROW: And he talked about a Black-oriented test - The Black Intelligence Test of Cultural Homogeneity. We've got a few questions from another test like that. It's called "The Dove Counter Balance General Intelligence Test." Are you ready? Take down all the possible answers, and we'll give you 30 seconds to decide on the right choice.

BLAIR: Here's the first question: Cheap chitlins (not the kind you purchase at a frozen food counter) will taste rubbery unless they are cooked long enough. How soon can you quit cooking them to eat and enjoy them? A) 45 minutes, B) Two hours, C) 24 hours, D) One week on a low flame, E) One hour?

MERROW: Here's Question #2: A "hype" is a person who - A) Always says he feels sickly, B) Has water on the brain, C) Uses heroin, D) Is always rippin' and runnin', E) Is always sick.

BLAIR: That's a "hype." If a man is called a "blood," he is a - A) Fighter, B) Mexican-American, C) Negro, D) Hungry hemophile, E) Redman or Indian?

MERROW: Well, your time is up. The Dove Counter Balance General Intelligence Test was developed at the Cultural Study Center at the University of Maryland. Oh, the correct answers? Item "C" in every case. How'd you do?

BLAIR: Well, I did lousy, but you cook cheap chitlins for 24 hours. A "hype" is a person who uses heroin. And if a man is called a "blood," he is a Negro.

As Columnist William Raspberry indicated, tests may simply sort out how well you take tests, and how well you did on the test - nothing more.

MERROW: That is, tests aren't racist by definition, but our society is as preoccupied with race as it is with intelligence.

BLAIR: One of the biggest controversies of recent years is the debate over race and intelligence. Crudely put, are Blacks inherently, i.e., genetically, less intelligent than whites?

MERROW: I asked Noel Epstein, Education Editor of The Washington Post and Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, former Director of the National Institute of Education, whether it's ethical to even ask such questions.

MORE WITH NOEL EPSTEIN & DR. HAROLD HODGKINSON

HODGKINSON: Sure. I don't see any reason why that question can't be asked. I think we would be a lot worse off if we banned the question, and said that as a government edict there shall be no consideration of that question.

MERROW: But you also have to be very conscious of whom you ask to study that, or how many people?

HODGKINSON: It's precisely right. The Jensen-Shockley Debate, of course, was I think a good debate. I'm glad we had it because I think it made people think more seriously about those issues.

MERROW: Go ahead, Noel.

EPSTEIN: I'd just like to say that it's a very, very sensitive question you're asking. Who would determine? I mean, would government determine whether researchers can ask questions or not? I don't think government should say, "Yes. Somebody can ask this question and can't ask that question." I'd be very, very troubled.

MERROW: Government does it all the time. Bud Hodgkinson was Director of the National Institute of Education, and the people who worked for him decided what studies to fund and what studies not to fund.

EPSTEIN: Well, that's true, but there are other sources of funding than the National Institute of Education, and researchers on the campuses are doing their own studies. And if you mean - Should the government fund people who ask that question? - I think that would be a very politically risky decision for someone who runs the National Institute of Education. I don't think there should be any edict which says no. I think that's a political decision.

HODGKINSON: John, we have public advisory committees on all of our research areas that are broadly representative of public thought and opinion. What I thought you meant was: Should the government ban anyone who wants to investigate the issue of heredity and environment?

MERROW: And you're saying, "No. The ban would be worse than . . ."

HODGKINSON: No question about it.

MERROW: But you would also say that Federal funds should not be used for certain research questions?

HODGKINSON: No. I think you just have to make sure that you're covering as many bases as possible. The reason this particular issue is so difficult, and Noel is one of the few researchers, reporter/researchers, that I know of in that they've learned enough about it so that they know the techniques. These things are all worked out on probability theory, and that has nothing much to do with social life. So, on the issue of whether Black kids do significantly better on some tests, or significantly worse, you've got to look at the

word "significantly" very carefully before you make up your mind. I would never say, however, that we ought to ban such research.

MERROW: Okay. Let me argue the other side. Suppose you do a study, and you can demonstrate that a significant level of probability . . . that Blacks are smarter than whites, or whites are smarter than Blacks, either one. Or, let's say that whites are genetically and inherently smarter than Blacks. What are your policy implications? What's the value of having done a study like that, if it doesn't have any use? The policy implications are what? Intermarry? Or send all Black people back to Africa?

HODGKINSON: Well, you're asking the question in the way we asked the question about forty years ago, which is - Is there an inherent thing called "smarts," which whites have more of or less of than Blacks? And today we've found that there are a lot of ways in which you can divide up the intelligence and skill range, and we can talk about working with - oh, let's say, people who are good at working with data, and people who are good at working with other people, and people who are good at working with mechanical things. You find very little overlap across those three. So, we can ask the question much more specifically than we used to.

MERROW: I see. So, what you're saying, then, is that the question is so crudely phrased that no responsible researcher would ask it in that way.

HODGKINSON: If you said to me, "I'll give you a million dollars to investigate the question: Who's got the most smarts? Whites or Blacks? - I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole.

EPSTEIN: No. I'd like to add something there. The thing that puzzles me is why people then don't come in and say, "Why are Chinese-Americans smarter than whites?" It's always in a Black/white syndrome here. And the point is that we've got lots of groups that are totally ignored. The Asian-Americans, in general, Japanese-Americans, too, consistently, I think, according to the evidence, have done better than whites in school and, in many cases, in higher education and in jobs, and as scholars. My problem is, again, how we phrase the question. Chinese-Americans are one of the most neglected groups in terms of studies and in terms of the way the press reports. I'd like to know why Chinese-Americans or Jewish-Americans or Italian-Americans, or Irish-Americans who do better than many people believe them to be doing, are doing that well - and not just Black/white.

MERROW: So, you're suggesting that there's something much more pernicious going on when that kind of question is asked?

EPSTEIN: Yes. I'm suggesting that the question is not really trying to look at why one group - if you can find a reason - does better than the other group, but is just looking at the racial issue of Blacks and whites, and somebody wants to find out are Blacks really less smart. I mean, that's really what's in their mind - genetically. And that troubles me personally, although I would never suggest that government intervene and say somebody can't look at that question.

BLAIR: Noel Epstein of The Washington Post and Dr. Harold Hodgkinson, former Director of the National Institute of Education. The issue isn't always Black and white intelligence. The same kinds of questions are asked about differences between males and females based on test scores - especially mathematics scores. Women, traditionally, score lower in math for lots of reasons. Lack of intelligence is not one of them.

MERROW: Dr. Elias Blake, Director of the Institute for Services to Education, a Black think-tank, has his own modest proposal regarding testing the comparative intelligence of Blacks and whites.

DR. ELIAS BLAKE

BLAKE: They need another long-term experiment based on the fact that there would be a number of African nations who would get in ships and raid the Eastern Seaboard of the United States for about 10 million white slaves. And then they would take those slaves to Africa, keep them in slavery for about 200 years as they build their industrial economy, and business, agricultural economy in Africa. And then they would free them and keep them in menial jobs and in segregated schools and in segregated neighborhoods for another hundred years. Then, after all of that treatment, some African social scientists would then test the white children of these former white slaves to see whether or not they were equal in intelligence to the Africans. But the tests would require that they read and write and calculate in the African languages that they now know very well, which you learn.

Then, after about 350 years from now, they could do some cross-cultural studies to measure the impact of the African slavery experience on the white children and then match that with the impact of the American slavery experience on Black children. So, what I would suggest is they set that up, and then put a moratorium on tests of any ability of Blacks versus whites for about 350 years, and then come back and do that cross-cultural study. Really, it makes as much sense to me when I hear about the Jensen-type research. You're never going to settle it by arguments among social scientists about whether or not Blacks are innately equal in terms of their intelligence. No self-respecting Black is ever going to accept that. And all those social scientists do is really set up the possibility of greater and greater racial conflict in the society - because my own view is, and I'm going to fight that by political means, whatever it takes I have to stop that.

MERROW: Dr. Elias Blake, Director of the Institute for Services to Education in Washington. Blake is also President-elect of Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia.

BLAIR: Several speakers on this program have mentioned Jensen and Schockley in their studies of race and intelligence. Drs. Arthur Jensen and William Shockley concluded that Blacks are inherently, genetically less intelligent than whites. Their studies caused a furor during the Late-Sixties and early-Seventies, particularly on college campuses. Their research has been soundly attacked both as racist and as methodologically unsound.

MERROW: Tests have been around for a long time. So, why is the controversy flaring up now? Well, perhaps because so many tests are being given.

BLAIR: Maybe. But some testmakers suspect that teachers are trying to squirm out of their own responsibility. Frank Snyder, Editorial Director at McGraw-Hill, a major test publisher, told The New York Times, "The National Education Association has seized on testing as a political issue. It's a good vehicle to attack accountability because there's no visible counterforce."

MERROW: In other words, educators fear the tests precisely because tests will allow the public to measure the effectiveness of schools and teachers.

BLAIR: The use of multiple-choice tests to measure writing ability also draws scorn from critics. "How," they ask, "can a multiple guess test tell whether a student can write?"

MERROW: "Easily and accurately," answers the College Entrance Examination Board. In fact, often better than actual writing tests. For one thing, handwriting can affect the grade you get on an essay, and no two essay graders are alike. While a computerized grader never varies. I taught composition for a couple of years, Wendy, and I'm sure that when, the time of day, I read a student's paper was a factor in my grading and so was handwriting.

BLAIR: I guess that's true for me, too. When I taught, if I had forty themes to read that day, then I bet I was more thorough on the first twenty-five or so.

MERROW: But, despite the evidence, the College Board is reinstituting the writing sample on the College Board Advancement Placement Test this year under pressure from colleges and schools. They're having a mass "grade-in" early in June. At that time, 600 high school and college teachers will read 500,000 essays.

BLAIR: Wow! Remember, though, even if multiple choice standardized tests can determine whether or not a student can write, they are no substitute for writing in school or for having that writing edited carefully by a trained teacher. All the test will do is give you a score, a prediction, as to whether or not the student can do the written work at the next level. Students still need the individual attention and the writing practice.

MERROW: That consortium of 42 organizations, led by the National Association of Elementary School Principals, is talking bravely about a final exam for standardized tests. But that's probably rhetorical over-kill. Even one of testing's sharpest critics, Jerrold Zacharias, doesn't imagine that standardized testing will end.

BLAIR: Dr. Zacharias is a physicist who developed the physics curriculum used in most high schools.

DR. JERROLD ZACHARIAS

ZACHARIAS: What makes me so furious about the available tests is that they're all so rotten, and that the school people are willing to buy those tests - and let me call it - "perpetrate" them on the kids.

MERROW: You've written that the tests call the tune on the texts.

ZACHARIAS: Well, any teacher who's got any sense knows perfectly well if the kid's going to get a test of a certain sort, you'd better give the kids a drill in that kind of test. And this has been going on, I would say - let me see. I graduated from high school in 1922. So, I know it was going on in 1921, and this was in Jacksonville, Florida. And it's been going on ever since. It goes on in every one of the elite schools of the Great Northwest (the Exeters, the Andovers, and so on), and they train these kids to do these tests. And, so, if you're doing that, there's time being used and you're not doing something else. I like to call it not a vicious circle - although it is vicious. I like to call it a viscous circle - namely, it'd muddy. The people in the industry try to go out and find out what's in the textbooks, what the school people want to test. Then, they go back and so far they're making a muddle of that, but they think they're finding out what the school people want. But, in the meantime, it's already happened before that the tests were out there which would, in fact, determine what the textbooks contained. And if you look carefully at the industry - at the companies - you'll find except for Educational Testing Service, which does tests only, that the other testing companies also make the textbooks.

MERROW: Now, it's generally impossible to find the beginning of a circle - whether it's a vicious one or viscous one - but how did this circle begin?

ZACHARIAS: The sad part is that this phenomenon of poor quality content and all of the learning aids that go with it - books of all sorts, everything, television, movies, exams and so on - is a worldwide phenomenon. It's not just a local American phenomenon. Remember that if you make a test item, if you make a test question, it has to be about something. If I grab this test, which I'm sure makes me angry, and read one of the questions, where would you find the most information about the life of Thomas Edison?

One, the dictionary, two, the encyclopedia, three, a World Atlas, or the World Almanac. If the kids had a book about Thomas Edison, or if Thomas Edison had come up, the lucky ones who had seen it would be able to answer the questions. The unlucky ones, who don't know Thomas Edison from a hole in the head, would miss it.

MERROW: So, that test item should have been - Where will you find the most about O. J. Simpson or Jimmy Carter or . . . ?

ZACHARIAS: No, I don't think so. No. The trouble with that question is - Where would you find the most information? -- Dictionary, encyclopedia, World Atlas or the World Almanac — you say, "Well, the encyclopedia generally has longer articles than the dictionary. So, the encyclopedia is right." The dictionary is the only thing I've got so I'd better look in the dictionary. A World Atlas is mostly maps. Maybe that wouldn't be right. But he may have invented something about maps. How do I know? And the World Almanac contains all things to all people. I don't . . . I wouldn't know how to answer the question. I'm sure, being a very skillful test-taker — I'm one of those kids and so were you -- who could out-psyche the test-writer. So, I could get it right. I'll bet. On the other hand, that's not what kids go to school to learn to do.

MERROW: There is the argument, though, being advanced by a number of people that kids should be taught to take those tests.

ZACHARIAS: I believe kids should be taught to take the tests that are out there.

MERROW: All the while you're arguing, though, that those tests should be scrapped.

ZACHARIAS: Yeah. But there are a lot of things you have to learn how to do that are not terribly useful, and which are sort of objectionable.

MERROW: When in Rome, learn to take the tests that the Romans take.

ZACHARIAS: Right, right!

BLAIR:

Dr. Jerrold Zacharias, a retired professor at M.I.T., now involved in production of Public Television's math program, "The Infinity Factory."

MERROW: Just out of curiosity, I looked up the use of tests in a couple of public school systems. Let me tell you about Cincinnati. With a budget of $82 million, Cincinnati spends $209,000 every year on testing. Now, that's only one-quarter of 1%, not very much money. The average child, they told me in Cincinnati, spends 2 1/2 hours per year taking standardized tests. And that's not very much time. But just think of it. Two and a half hours a year. Those have to be the most important 2 1/2 hours of any school kid's year.

The future? It looks like more and more tests. Why? Because Criterion Reference Tests are the rage now, and the logic goes -- If tests aren't measuring the right things, or not measuring these things well enough, we just need more and better tests.

BLAIR: Representative Albert Quie of Minnesota, who has a lot to say about education, wants to see the biggest Federal aid program for education distributed on the basis of test scores. That program, Title I of the Elementary & Secondary Education Act is now targeted for schools in low income areas.

MERROW: Another reason for more and more testing? Good jobs are getting scarce today and so competition is intense. That will mean more tests and more measures that are supposedly objective in measuring performance and abilities.

BLAIR: Add to that the fact that scores are the most visible form of measuring how schools are doing in an age of accountability. We all want to measure how we're doing and school

boards are no exception. Since tests are so visible, schools will continue to organize themselves around test scores. Often, public opinion demands it.

MERROW: And, finally, that means that unless there are stronger protests, the misuses and outrages will continue. Educators and other admissions officers will continue to look at the test scores, or, worse yet, look at just one test score to decide whether to admit you or your child to such and such a college, or to law school.

I think they should ban all I.Q. tests and do away with them. Group I.Q. tests are something that we got enamored with in the 1930's.

If you said to me, "I'll give you $1 million to investigate the question - Who's got the most smarts? Whites or Blacks? - I wouldn't touch you with a 10-foot pole.

Tests are supposed to uncover abilities, but I'm convinced that test-taking is in itself a distinct and important ability.

BLAIR: Next week, we'll be examining educational research - Who's Studying Whom? And What Good Is It?

MERROW: I went to the annual meeting of The American Educational Research Association, and I heard a lot of people talking about "The Bayesian Decision, Theoretic Model for Summative and Formative Evaluations and Post Assessment Organizational Change." And "Needs Assessment and Goal Attainment for Perceptual Motor Deficiencies Among Vocational Education Students in Bristol, Virginia." And "The Relationship Between the Competency of Differentiated Teaching Staff in an Open Classroom Program and Pupil Achievement in a Sample of Low Income Primary Children in Arizona." I can't wait to tell you about it!

BLAIR: I hope we can give an award to the paper with the longest title.

MERROW: Exactly!

BLAIR: Reports for this program came, in part, from Dan Freudberg in Boston, and David Selvin and Bob Edwards in Washington.

MERROW: If you'd like to check your answers on some of those questions you've just heard, it's all in the transcript. You can get the transcripts of this two-part series on "Testing & Research" by sending $1.00 to National Public Radio - Education, Washington, D. C. 20036. The two cassettes cost $10.00.

BLAIR: Ask for Programs #78 & 79, and do tell us the call letters of your local NPR station.

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BLAIR: This series is written and produced by John Merrow and Jo Ellyn Rackleff. The Assistant Producer is Katherine Ferguson. Technical Assistance by Dave Harris. I'm Wendy Blair.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, and this is NPR - National Public Radio.